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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN POLITICS #25: FERNANDEZ'S SPECIAL  
BRIEFING BEFORE VISITING THE UNITED STATES

1. (SBU) Following is #25 in our series on the first year of  
the Fernandez administration:

Fernandez's Special Briefing Before Visiting the United States  
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Last week U.S. academic Howard Wiarda of the University of Georgia became Leonel Fernandez's personal trainer for the President's trip May 9-12 to the United States to meet President Bush. Wiarda was in Santo Domingo for a three-day seminar and an inhouse invitation-only lecture on May 5 at Fernandez's Fundacin Global (FUNGLODE). Fernandez thinks highly of Wiarda. He told Foreign Minister Carlos Morales Troncoso to be at the event, and Fernandez invited Wiarda for a two-hour private breakfast/discussion the next day.

Wiarda had spent close to two hours with the Embassy's political officer on May 3, before beginning his presentations. The two were acquaintances from Brazil and from Wiarda's visit last year for the presidential elections. Political officer attended the standing-room-only audience at the FUNGLODE auditorium for Wiarda's talk on &The Foreign Policy of the Second Bush Administration.8 Fernandez and Morales Troncoso were there. Deputy Foreign Minister Alejandra Liriano introduced Wiarda and took notes at the head table. Print media have paid scant attention because they were not invited. One brief mention appeared in "Diario Libre" May 6. Germn Marte's longer article in "Hoy" on May 7 was based on an interview in which Wiarda explained the political obstacles to U.S. ratification of CAFTA. Following their usual editorial slant, "Hoy" editors titled the front page piece &Expert Foresees Rejection of CAFTA by U.S. Congress.8

Highlights of the hour-long address, followed by more than half an hour of Q&A :

- - U.S. foreign policy today, as in much of the past, attaches a low priority to Latin America. Top policymakers by and large have paid attention only to crises in the region.
- - This is inevitable, because the United States as the sole superpower must engage with &more than 200 political entities8 (nations and international organizations). The Dominican Republic is a small blip on a big screen.
- - Dominicans tend to overestimate U.S. interest here, since on their screen the United States outshines all others.
- - &Benign neglect8 is not necessarily a bad thing. Crisis managers in Washington are exasperated with countries that keep them awake at night. Substantive regional policymaking takes place below the White House and cabinet, at assistant secretary and DAS level, by officials who have relevant area expertise and experience.
- - Since January, many of these sub-cabinet officials have been replaced by less ideological, more pragmatic successors. Secretary of State Rice has more interest in the developing nations than her predecessor.
- - President Fernandez will go to Washington at a propitious moment. After 3-1/2 years of the global war on terror, which is on the way to being won, the second Bush administration is &looking for a way to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq,8 move away from an overriding concern with counter-terrorism, and &return to more normal diplomacy.8
- - &Mr. President, you will find U.S. policymakers more open to your proposals and your country's needs than at any time in the recent past. It's up to you and your government to take advantage of this favorable moment (coyuntura).8
- - Secretary Rice's recent trips to Latin America and Europe are important signals of this rebalancing of U.S. priorities.

- - The administration is taking up recommendations that Dr. Wiarda and other academic experts originally developed for President George H.W. Bush in 1991-92 on future directions of post-Cold War policy. The recommendations were shunted aside during the Clinton Administration, began to be implemented in 2001 with Mexico, were thrown into abeyance by 9/11, and are again being dusted off. Essentially: Reduce the traditional emphasis on Europe and the Middle East; devote more attention to Asia and Latin America.

- - The Dominican Republic is a much more sophisticated partner for the United States today than in 1962, when Wiarda first came here. Then the country was 75 percent illiterate, 70 percent rural, underdeveloped, and dependent on sugar for 80 percent of its exports; today Dominicans are 75 percent literate, 70 percent urban, produce more in commerce, services, and manufacturing than in agriculture, and depend on sugar for only 3 to 4 percent of GDP and a small fraction of exports.

- - The Dominican-American community is entering politics, holds elected offices at municipal and state levels, and is beginning to influence policy as part of the large Hispanic minority in the United States. Dominican-Americans will help promote this country's interests in the United States, e.g., in the current lobbying for U.S. ratification of CAFTA, which would offer the country unrestricted access to the world's biggest market.

- - The changes in the country since the fall of the Trujillo dictatorship reflect those elsewhere in Latin America. Thirty years ago, 17 of the 20 countries had authoritarian regimes; today 19 of 20 (34 of 35 if all the Caribbean is included) have governments that are more or less democratic. Stable democracy correlates highly with developed economies. Unstable Haiti, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Paraguay are illustrative. Venezuela is an exception & because it floats on oil.<sup>8</sup>

- - U.S. authorities prefer to deal with democracies, which are more responsible than extreme regimes of right or left.

- - Structural issues in the region include corruption, poverty, income inequality, social justice, and a growing disenchantment with democracy among citizens who do not enjoy expected benefits in well-being or services such as education and health care. Strong democratic faith in the Dominican Republic relates to bad memories of the Trujillo era.

Q&A were led off by polemical Hamlet Herman, who criticized Wiarda's view of U.S. policy changes as optimistic. Other questioners chimed in skeptically on specifics. The speaker gave reasoned replies to each.

12. (U) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell.

3.(U) This piece and others in our series may be consulted on our classified SIPRNET site <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo> along with extensive other material.  
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